

Application No.: 09/658,977

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IN THE CLAIMS

1. A computer-implemented method of retrieving product distribution information comprising:

(a) storing a plurality of first relationships information and second relationship information, said relationship information where each relationship identifies identifying a buyer, a seller and a product to be provided from said seller to said buyer,

(b) said retrieving a first relationship, wherein the first relationship information identifying identifies a first entity as said buyer, a second entity as said seller, and a first product as said product,

a1 (c) determining whether a second relationship identifies the seller in said first relationship as a buyer in said second relationship and whether the product in the second relationship relates to said product in the first relationship,

(d) retrieving said second relationship dependant upon the result of the step of determining.

said second relationship information identifying said second entity as said buyer, a third entity as said seller, and said first product as said product, retrieving said first relationship information,

(e) retrieving said second relationship information based on the identity of said seller and the identity of said product contained in said first relationship information.

2. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of storing a third relationship information identifying said the seller in the second relationship as a buyer in the third relationship, and where the product in the third relationship is related to the product in the second relationship. third entity

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~~as said buyer, a fourth entity as said seller, and said first product as said product.~~

3. The method of claim 1 wherein said product is a stamp.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein the product in the first relationship is a first product, the product in the second relationship is a second product, and the first and second products are related if the said first product is a part or all of a second product and said first relationship identifies a second product containing said part.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein said product is a service or a product and a service.

6. The method of claim 1 wherein said steps of storing relationship information further comprises storing the compensation which seller agrees to accept for said product from said buyer.

7. The method of claim 6 wherein said compensation is the price of the product.

8. The method of claim 7 wherein said compensation is a commission.

97. The method of claim 1 wherein said first entity is a class of entities.

108. The method of claim 97 wherein said class is the general public.

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119. The method of claim 97 wherein said step of retrieving said first relationship information comprises displaying to said first entity at least two products associated with those relationships identifying said first entity as said buyer, and determining said first relationship information based upon the product selected by an entity of said class.

1210. The method of claim 1 further comprising the step of storing a description of said product.

1311. The method of claim 1210 wherein said description comprises an image, a textual description, or an image and a textual description.

1412. The method of claim 1 further comprising the steps of:

(a) said first entity requesting ~~said first the~~ product from said second entity and storing said request,

(b) storing a request for said ~~first product~~ by said second entity to said third entity based on the second relationship information ~~retrieved during said step of retrieving said second relationship information~~.

1513. The method of claim 1412 further comprising notifying said third entity of said request.

1614. The method of claim 1412 wherein said requests includes the quantity of said product.

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1715. The method of claim 1412 wherein said requests include the shipping destination or destinations of said product.

1816. The method of claim 1 wherein said step of retrieving said second relationship information comprises searching for relationships wherein the buyer of the relationship identifies the seller of said first relationship and the product of the relationship identifies the product of said first relationship.

1917. The method of claim 1 further comprising the steps of storing additional relationships associated with said product; repeating said step of retrieving said second relationship by recursively assuming that some of the values of said first relationship are equal to the values of said second relationship.

2018. The method of claim 1917 wherein said step of repeating terminates when there is no relationship identifying the seller of said second relationship as a buyer of the same product in another relationship.

2119. A computer-implemented method of providing information about a product including typesetting comprising:

(a) storing data representing a product available from a ~~first member mid-level entity~~ to a class of customers, said product including typesetting;

(b) storing data representing an agreement by a top-level second member to provide said product to said first mid-level member;

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(c) receiving a customer request from a customer of said class of customers for said product, said customer request including typesetting information describing said typesetting;

(d) storing said customer request;

(e) retrieving said agreement based on the identity of said product and the identity of said ~~first~~ mid-level member associated with said customer request, wherein the agreement identifies the mid-level member as the recipient of the product provided by the top-level member;

(f) generating a second request that said ~~second~~ top-level member provide said product to said mid-level ~~first~~ member, said second request identifying said typesetting information;

(g) transmitting said second request to said top-level ~~second~~ member.

2220. The method of claim 2119 wherein said class of customers comprises a single entity.

2321. The method of claim 2119 further comprising storing data representing an agreement by a third member to provide said product to said top-level ~~second~~ member; retrieving said agreement by said third member based on the identity of said product and the identity of said top-level ~~second~~ member.

2422. The method of claim 2321 wherein said typesetting information comprises an image.

2523. The method of claim 2422 further comprising the steps of receiving a plurality of requests from a plurality of customers of said class of customers, and wherein the image

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associated with one customer request is different from the image associated with another customer request.

2624. The method of claim 2523 wherein said step of storing said customer requests from said customers comprises storing said different images in the same file format.

2725. The method of claim 2624 further comprising the step of said top-level second-member retrieving said image.

2826. The method of claim 2725 further comprising the step of converting said image from said file format to a different file format before said step of said top-level second member retrieving said image.

2927. The method of claim 2523 wherein said step of storing said customer requests from said customers comprises storing said different images in different file formats.

3028. The method of claim 2927 wherein said different file formats correspond with file formats used by said members.

3129. The method of claim 2119 further comprising the step of manufacturing said product.

3230. The method of claim 2119 wherein said product is a stamp and said typesetting relates to the impression on said stamp.

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3331. The method of claim 2119 wherein said requests identify said typesetting information by reference to information stored in a database.

3432. The method of claim 2119 wherein said step of receiving said customer request comprises receiving said customer request over a global telecommunications network.

3533. A computer-implemented method of retrieving information comprising:

(a) storing first relationship information and second relationship information, said relationship information identifying a buyer, a seller and a first product provided from said seller to said buyer,

(b) said first relationship information identifying a first entity as said buyer, a second entity as said seller, and a first product as said product,

(c) said second relationship information identifying said second entity as said buyer, a third entity as said seller, and a second product as said product,

(d) retrieving said first relationship information,

(e) retrieving said second relationship information based on the identity of said second entity-seller identified in said first relationship information.

3634. A system for storing information about buyers and sellers of products comprising:

(a) a database containing a plurality of relationship records, each said relationship record identifying a buyer, a seller and a product provided from said seller to said buyer,

(b) a processor for retrieving a second relationship record based on a first relationship record, whereby said buyer

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entity identified in said second relationship record is the same entity as the seller identified in said second relationship record, and whereby said product identified in said second relationship record is related to said product identified in said first relationship record.

3735. The system of claim 3634 wherein database is stored at a central location.

3836. The system of claim 3735 wherein said database is stored in a single server.

3937. A system for storing information about relationships between buyers and sellers, said system maintained by an administrator, said system comprising:

(a) data representing an agreement by a middle entity to provide a product to a bottom entity in exchange for compensation and an agreement by a top entity to provide a related product to said middle entity in exchange for compensation, none of said entities being said administrator, and

(b) a processor for utilizing said data to process a request for said product from said bottom entity to said middle entity such that said request generates a request for said product from said middle entity to said top entity based on the middle entity being identified as the buyer in one of the stored agreements and the seller in the other stored agreement.

4038. The system of claim 3937 wherein said data further comprises another agreement by another entity to provide said product to said top entity.



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4139. A computer-implemented method of retrieving information relating to a request for personalized products, said method comprising:

(a) storing an agreement by a second entity to provide a product to a first entity,

(b) storing an agreement by a third entity to provide said product to said second entity,

(c) said first entity requesting said product from said second entity such that the request includes modifying the product in accordance with personalization information provided by said first entity, said personalization information being particular to said first entity, and

(d) generating a request for said product from said second entity to third entity based on said stored agreements and the second entity being common to both agreements, said request from said second entity to said third entity including said personalization information.

4240. The method of claim 4139 wherein said personalization information comprises an image.

4341. A computer-implemented method of selling products over the world-wide web, said method comprising:

(a) providing a database centrally storing agreements between a plurality of members to sell a product;

(b) sending a web page from a first member to a customer, said web page identifying a product that is the subject of one of said agreements of said database;

(c) receiving a request for said product from said customer, said request including an image provided by said customer;

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(d) generating a first purchase order from said first member to a second member based on a second agreement stored in said database, said purchase order including said image, and

(e) generating a second purchase order from said second member to a third member based on a third agreement stored in said database, said purchase order including said image.

4442. The method of claim 4341 further comprising the step of said members storing said agreements by sending information relating to such agreement to said database.

a1 4543. The method of claim 4341 wherein said product comprises a stamp having an impression representing said image.

4644. The method of claim 4341 wherein said product comprises a printed item or sign containing said image.